



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity

**Policies on Free Primary and Secondary
Education in East Africa:
A Review of the Literature**

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Summary

Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are among the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which have recently implemented policies for free primary education, motivated in part by renewed democratic accountability following the re-emergence of multi-party politics in the 1990s. However, it is not the first time that the goal of expanding primary education has been pursued by these three neighbouring countries which have much in common. Since the 1960s, they have attempted to expand access at various levels of their education systems albeit with differences in philosophy and in both the modes and successes of implementation. All three countries continue to face the challenges of enrolling every child in school, keeping them in school and ensuring that meaningful learning occurs for all enrolled children.

This paper provides an a review of the three countries' policies for expanding access to education, particularly with regard to equity and the enrolment of excluded groups since their political independence in the 1960s. It considers policies in the light of the countries' own stated goals alongside the broader international agendas set by the Millennium Development Goals and in particular, 'Education for All'. It is concerned with the following questions: What led to those policies and how were they funded? What was the role, if any, of the international community in the formulation of those policies? What were the politics and philosophies surrounding the formulation of those policies, have the policies changed over time, and if so how and why? The paper also discusses the range of strategies for implementation adopted.

Tremendous growth has occurred in access to primary education since the 1960s, not least in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The challenge of providing equitable access to schooling has been addressed in a series of education drives with varying motivations, modalities and degrees of success, the most recent of which pays attention to the increasingly pressing question of the transition to secondary education. The success of such policy remains to be seen but will be crucial for the widening of access to the benefits of education and to economic opportunity, particularly for those groups which history has so far excluded.

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